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ABSTRACT

Faults of special education include its medical view of disability, its arbitrary division of students into handicapped and nonhandicapped, and the resultant separation between general and special education. Disabled adults are becoming less tolerant of an educational system that fails to recognize the capabilities of handicapped students. Society's attitudes toward disability are often more disabling than the handicapping condition itself. The labeling of students as handicapped lowers expectations for them and denies them autonomy and decision-making authority. The total educational system must change to ensure that disabled children receive an equal education. Students with mild and moderate handicapping conditions should be integrated into general education programs at the building level. A new framework for education is needed, and it must focus on adapting instruction to individual differences to maximize common goal attainment. Recommended is a merged or unitary system which rejects the bimodal division of handicapped and nonhandicapped and recognizes that individuals vary. Such a system requires: adaptations in society and in education, not solely in the individual; the use of effective educational practices in classrooms and schools; appropriate supports for disabled students and their families; and application of school effectiveness research, cross-cultural research, and adaptive education approaches. (JDD)

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BEYOND SPECIAL EDUCATION

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The Council for Exceptional Children

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N.B. This presentation is excerpted from our forthcoming article, "Beyond Special Education: Quality Education for All" Harvard Educational Review November, 1987. It describes the background to the current situation; examines in detail current special education practices (concerning referrals and assessment procedures, placement options, educational programs, Least Restrictive Environment, and parental participation); and, then, turns to proposals for a new unified system, special for all students. The paper also includes citations and references.

Beyond Special Education

The faults of current special education practice are myriad. It incorporates a medical view of disability, which characterizes the disability as inherent in the individual, and thus formulates two separate categories of people, handicapped and nonhandicapped, as useful and rational distinctions.

This arbitrary division of students provides the rationale for educating students with handicapping conditions in separate programs, and even in completely separate systems. The assumptions underlying separate programs have produced a system that is both segregated and second class.

It is our belief that the attitudes and assumptions about the disabled and disability require change, as do the inadequacies in general and special education practice. The need for such changes is both consequence and cause of a unitary system, thereby encouraging the production of an education model for all students---supple, variegated, and individualized---in an integrated setting.

While special education programs of the past decade have been successful in bringing into public education unserved students and have established their right to education, these programs have failed both to overcome the

separation between general and special education and to make the separate system significant in terms of student benefits.

A World of Disabling Attitudes

The National Council on the Handicapped, appointed by President Reagan, has reiterated what people with disabilities have been saying for years: their major obstacles arise from external rather than internal barriers. The Council cites, with approval the statement of an expert panel:

> Despite everything we can do, or hope to do, to assist each physically or mentally disabled person achieve his or her maximum potential in life, our efforts will not succeed until we have found the way to remove the obstacles to this goal directed by human society---the physical barriers we have created in public buildings, housing, transportation, houses of worship, centers of social life and other community facilities---the social barriers we have evolved and accepted against those who vary more than a certain degree from what we have been conditioned to regard as normal. More people are forced into limited lives and made to suffer by these man-made obstacles than by any specific physical or mental disability.

A quarter of a century ago, Erving Goffman addressed this issue. He wrote, "By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human." The point has been made more recently by Ved Mehta. "You see, we are confronted with a vast ignorance in the world about the handicapped [so that] they would not understand if we acted like normal people.

In a variety of ways, persons with disabilities are neither treated like nor viewed as "normal people." More often, they are treated "specially" either for their own good or for someone else's, but always according to an externally imposed standard.

Increasingly, given public attitudes and policies such as these, persons with disabilities have developed a minority group outlook. This has been reflected recently in writings by disability rights activists and others in the independent-living movement. For them, "the problem of disability is not only of physical impairment but also of unnecessary dependence on relatives and professionals, of architectural barriers and of unprotected rights." This formulation is echoed in the report of the first national survey of self-perceptions of Americans with disabilities.

> --An overwhelming majority, 74 percent, say they feel at least some sense of common identity with other people with disabilities. (Table 56)
>
> --Nearly half, 45 percent, feel that disabled persons are a minority group in the same sense as Blacks and Hispanics. This figure rises to 56 percent of those disabled between birth and adolescence and 53 percent of those 44 years of age and younger.

This emerging and growing involvement of adults with disabilities can have a major impact in the field of special education. These individuals will be less likely to tolerate an educational system that fails to recognize the capabilities of handicapped students and to prepare them to deal with the realities of the outside world.

Special Education: Disabling Attitudes in Practice

It is the attitudinal milieu more than the individual's physical condition that influences society's response to persons with disabilities. An all-or-nothing concept of disability requires proof of total incapacity in order to gain entitlement to various benefit programs. Further, the media portrayal of disabled persons is one of either the heroic individual or the pathetic

cripple, rather than a human being possessing a multiplicity of qualities. Together these images of disability burden policy, including the education of students with disabilities. This point was recognized by Justice William Brennan, writing for the Supreme Court in School Board of Nassau County v. Arline, who said, "Congress acknowledged that society's accumulated myths and fears about disability and disease are as handicapping as are the physical limitations that flow from actual impairment."

Society's attitudes toward disability are deeply ingrained in professional practice. This is particularly evident in the social-psychological literature, where disability is based on the following assumptions: (1) disability is biologically based; (2) disabled persons face endless problems, which are caused by the impairment; (3) disabled persons are "victims"; (4) disability is central to the disabled person's self-concept and self-definition; and (5) disability is synonymous with a need for help and social support.

Similar assumptions hold true in special education. Here the child and family are considered impaired, instruction is disability-focused, professional personnel are often trained and certified to work with specific disabilities, and attention to societal issues often is considered too political and not the business of educational institutions. The assumptions underlying such beliefs can be tersely summarized: "(1) Disability is a condition that individuals have; (2) disabled/typical is a useful and objective distinction; and (3) special education is a rationally conceived and coordinated system of services that help children labeled disabled..."

This view of students labeled as handicapped, however, adversely affects expectations.

Writing about their experience with Chicago area schools, where their young son was identified as being in need of special education, Lori and Bill Granger conclude:

> The trap of Special Education was now open and waiting for the little boy. It is a beguiling trap. Children of Special Education are children of Small Expectations, not great ones. Little is expected and little is demanded. Gradually, these children---no matter their IQ level---learn to be cozy in the category of being "special." They learn to be less than they are.

Not only do "small expectations" excuse students from academic performance; they have also led state education departments, school systems, and the courts to excuse them from the social and behavioral expectations and standards set for other students. The medical or clinical model that undergirds special education inextricably leads to the belief that persons with a handicap, especially the severely disabled, are not capable of making choices or decisions. This conceptualization diminishes "our ability to see them as individuals capable of ever making choice, let alone the right choice. Seldom, if ever, is the person with the handicapping condition involved in the process of determining how their behavior, or the behavior of those around them, will be modified. The end result is more control for the caregivers and less control for the person being cared for." Having denied individuals with disabilities autonomy and decisionmaking authority---in effect denying them the respect given to people whom society respects---we then excuse their behavior, ascribing it to the disability.

General Education

It is not special education that must change; it is the total educational system. The origin, growth, and shape of special education have in many ways been defined by general education and the attitudes and behaviors of mainstream educators toward students with handicapping conditions. Whatever the rationale or the benign purpose claimed, children with disabilities have been denied access to public education, or, when given access, have received an education that is not equal to that given other children.

The growth of special education in the past decade has occurred not only in response to the exclusion of students with handicapping conditions. Additional factors that have fueled this growth include: (1) cutbacks in Chapter I (formerly Title I) programs and other school remedial efforts that strained local school system resources (in the same period as and coincidental with the implementation of PL 94---142); (2) the development of remedial and pull-out programs for students with "problems"---slow learners, "disadvantaged," limited-English-proficient (miscalled bilingual), new immigrants, and gay and lesbian students; and (3) given the increased emphasis on accountability, the referral of "low achievers" to special education programs, thus excluding them from test-score analyses in school districts.

Another factor promoting exclusion has been a narrowing of the definition of what is considered "normal." In special education, "this often means referral based on race, sex, physical appearance, and socioeconomic

status..." A recent study in ten states noted that referral occurs when student behavior and academic achievement vary negatively from the school norm, and for minority students when their socioeconomic status is lower than the norm of the community. Additionally, the role of school psychologists, given their training and the present educational philosophy, gives professional rationale for special education placements and for the ever-growing identification of deviant, or to use the more recent term, "at-risk" students. The obverse of this has consequences for those students who remain in regular classroom programs. "Every time a child is called mentally defective and sent off to the special education class for some trivial defect, the children who are left in the regular classroom receive a message no one is above suspicion; everyone is being watched by the authorities; nonconformity is dangerous."

The problem is not special education or general education alone. "In a sense, regular and special education teachers have colluded to relieve regular teachers of responsibilities for teaching children functioning at the bottom of their class." The pressure to "succeed" with high test scores, and with the very large class sizes that make individual attention extremely difficult, makes it more likely that teachers will seek uniformity of students rather than diversity. To put it more sharply, there is, in effect, a "deal" between special and general education. The former asserts a particular body of expertise and a unique understanding of "special" students, thus laying claim both to professional obligation and student benefit. The latter, because of the lack of skills and resources or prejudice, is often happy to hand over "these" students to a welcoming

special education system. This includes not only those with the traditional handicapping conditions, but increasing numbers of students labelled "learning disabled," a category that, at present, incorporates such a multitude of students that, under one or another definition, it may incorporate as many as 80 percent of the general education student body. The "deal is sanctioned, on one hand, by the clinicians who provide an intrapsychic justification for the referral, and, on the other hand, by those in the role of advocacy who see increasing numbers of students in special education as providing evidence of their effectiveness."

Next Steps

No discussion of a future education system for students with handicapping conditions can begin without acknowledgment of what has been achieved. As one of the PL 94-142 drafters writes, however, "If the law has been massively successful in assigning responsibility for students and setting up mechanisms to assure that schools carry out those responsibilities, it has been less successful in removing the barriers between general and special education. It did not anticipate that the artifice of delivery systems in schools might drive the maintenance of separate services and keep students from the mainstream."

In a seeming backlash against the poor quality of services for those with low-incidence handicaps, there is a call from some for a return to separate service. These include: a proposed resolution at the annual convention of the National Federation of the Blind to (re)establish specialized schools for the blind; a proposal from a group of superintendents of residential

schools and state directors of special education to (re)establish residential schools for deaf and blind students; the accreditation for the first time of a special education school by a regional accrediting association; and the approval by the New York State Education Department for the construction of a segregated high school for students with physical disabilities.

While the return to more restrictive settings may be understood in light of current special education services, the more predominant reaction of professionals and parents is to propose reforms designed to preclude or limit services to inappropriately labeled students and/or to lower the "barriers" between general and special education.

While no one can argue for the inappropriate labeling of students, one can also empathize with the directors of special education programs who see such students "dumped" into their programs. More disturbing, however, are efforts to impose an arbitrary "cap" on the number of students referred, to cut a "bargain" with general education, or to tighten criteria. While "tightening eligibility criteria may seem to make the problem go away,...the main effect might be either to (a) redirect referred students into other categorical services or programs; or (b) disguise as nonhandicapped the portion of students for whom technical eligibility cannot be demonstrated."

Alternative Delivery Systems

A service delivery alternative is the integration of students with mild and moderate handicaps into general education programs at the building level. Experimental programs using such an approach are being implemented in a number of states and districts, especially for students categorized as having "learning problems." A report to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education noted that present practices suffer from (1) fragmented approaches ("Many students who require help and are not learning effectively fall 'through the cracks' of a program structure based on preconceived definitions of eligibility..."); (2) a dual system ("The separate administrative arrangements for special programs contribute to a lack of coordination, raise questions about leadership, cloud areas of responsibility, and obscure lines of accountability within schools."); (3) stigmatization of students (producing in students "low expectations of success, failure to persist on tasks, the belief that failures are caused by personal inadequacies, and a continued failure to learn effectively.") and (4) placement decisions becoming a battleground between parents and schools. In light of such practices, the panel called for experimental programs for students with learning problems, which incorporate increased instructional time, support systems for teachers, empowerment of principals to control all programs and resources at the building level, and new instructional approaches that involve "shared responsibility" between general and special education.

While clearly an improvement over the present special education practice, this broad proposal nonetheless continues a dual system approach for a smaller (more severely impaired) population. As described a decade ago, such students will continue to be faced with consequences of negative attitudes and lowered expectations, with teachers making comparisons between them "in relation to degree of handicap rather than comparing (their) skill levels to the criteria of nonhandicapped skill performance."

Major work in the integration of students with severe multiple disabilities in the setting of classes at age-appropriate schools has been carried out by the California Research Institute on the Integration of Students with Severe Disabilities (CRI). In the past five years, they have worked with over two hundred classes serving more than two thousand students with severe handicaps in twenty San Francisco Bay area school districts. By integration, CRI means: (1) placement of classes in general school buildings which are the chronologically age-appropriate sites for the students; ()2) a balanced ratio (from 5 to 20 percent) of such classes in a school; (3) structured opportunities for regular and sustained interactions between severely disabled and nondisabled students; (4) participation of the severely disabled students in all non-academic activities of the school; and (5) implementation of a functional life-skills curriculum for severely disabled students. The rationale for the education of students with severe disabilities in integrated settings is to ensure their normalized community participation by providing systematic instruction in skills essential to success within the social and environmental contexts in which these skills ultimately will be used by the student. Thus, a key feature of the CRI

model is the mixing of classroom, school, and community-based learning situations.

This type of integration is a far cry from the "dumping" of students back into general education settings, rightly decried by parents and advocates after their long-fought battles. It is also vastly different from the segregated programs that have proven ineffective for many students.

A new framework for education is needed; its entire organization must be reconceptualized. Within this new framework, it would be appropriate to question programs of special education as a separate means of educating students who are deemed unable to profit from school simply because of their handicapping conditions.

This discriminatory way of categorizing serves the function of preserving class and skin color privileges as the schools perform their assigned sorting function. And, in the current wave of school reform, "members of advantaged social groups will still advocate treating their failing children in ways that maintain their advantaged status as much as possible." In essence

> [W]e are talking about the distribution of advantage and disadvantage in society through the differential provision of opportunities to acquire knowledge or to acquire the status that goes with having been exposed to a certain kind of knowledge. There is no question of simply doing it more or less effectively. Effectiveness in such situations only has a meaning when it relates to some set of recognized values or ideals.

It is not simply a matter of using the present measurement instruments more sensitively or more discretely. Nearly three quarters of a century ago, in

a series of essays concerning the use of new I.Q. tests to measure officer candidates for World War I, Walter Lippman wrote of his fear that these tests would be used to label children as inferior, and consign them to a second-class life. "It is not possible, I think, to imagine a more contemptible proceeding than to confront a child with a set of puzzles, and after an hour's monkeying with them, proclaim to the child, or to his parents, that here is a C-minus individual. It would not only be a contemptible thing to do. It would be a crazy thing to do..."

Drawing from an older history, one can learn from the experience on Martha's Vineyard in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when it was the home of the highest concentration in the U.S. of people who were deaf. They were full participants in community life as workers, friends, neighbors, and family members.

> [T]he fact that a society could adjust to disabled individuals, rather than requiring them to do all the adjusting as is the case in American society as a whole, raises important questions about the rights of the disabled and the responsibilities of those who are not. The Martha's Vineyard experience suggests strongly that the concept of a handicap is an arbitrary social category. And if it is a question of definition, rather than a universal given, perhaps it can be redefined, and many of the cultural preconceptions summarized in the term "handicapped," as it is now used, eliminated.
>
> The most important lesson to be learned from Martha's Vineyard is that disabled people can be full and useful members of a community if the community makes an effort to include them.

How then does one shape an educational system to include students with disabilities; one which is both consonant with and builds toward an inclusive society? Clearly it is not done by taking students from the general education setting and labeling them as "deficient," nor is it done, as in special education, by focusing on the setting in which instruction

takes place. Rather, research indicates that we must focus on the features of instruction that can produce improved learning for students. Current practices, however, mean the "dumbing" down of the curriculum "instead of adapting instruction to individual differences to maximize common goal attainment...special education programs...in the extreme, become merely dead ends where common goals have been dropped altogether."

An important step toward a restructured unitary system is expressed in a concept called "Rights Without Labels": namely, the provision of needed services for students without the deleterious consequences of classification and labeling. A joint statement issued by the National Association of School Psychologists, the National Association of Social Workers, and the National Coalition of Advocates for Students, suggests guidelines to encourage the education of (at least mild to moderately handicapped) students in general education settings.

Regardless of the conceptual undergirding of the organizational arrangements of education for students with handicapping conditions, special education practice needs substantial improvement. In maintaining a separate special education system, however, no matter how refined or improved, education will continue to operate based upon a set of organizational and student assumptions that disabled and nondisabled youngsters require two distinct sets of services, which in turn require distinct funding, service delivery, and organization. While PL 94-142 requires educational services for students with handicapping condition,s it does not require a special system.

There is an alternative to separate systems: a merged or unitary system. The conception of an unitary system requires a "paradigm" shift, a fundamental change in the way we think about differences among people in the ways we choose to organize schools for their education, and in how we view the purpose of that education. It rejects the bimodal division of handicapped and nonhandicapped students, and recognizes that individuals vary---that single characteristic definitions fail to capture the complexity of people. Moreover, it rejects the belief in the medical, deficit, or deviancy models---the foundation on which much of human services work is built---that sees the problem as being within the individual and the resolution as coming from one or another treatment modality. The unitary system requires adaptations in the society and adaptations in education, not solely in the individual

> No longer would there be a need to approach differences in human capabilities or characteristics as disabilities on which to base categorical groupings. In a merged system, an individual difference in visual ability, for example, could be viewed as only one of numerous characteristics of a student, rather than the overriding educational focus of a student's life...[I]t would not dictate differential placement and treatment according to a categorical affiliation which is often inherent in the disabilities approach to education.

In a merged or unitary system, effective practices in classrooms and schools would characterize education for all students. No longer would there be an education system that focuses on the limitations of "handicapped" students, a teacher's incapacity to teach students because of a lack of special credentials, or instruction that is determined by the label attached to students. Nor would blame be placed on students or family characteristics. Rather, the focus would be on effective instruction for all students based on the belief that "substantial student improvements occur when teachers accept the responsibility for the performance of all their students and when

they structure their classrooms so that student success is a primary product of the interaction that takes place there."

At present, students are hampered in their intellectual growth by the lack of appropriate supports available to them and their families. Appropriate supports could include: assessment based on multidimensional axes; psychosocial evaluations directed toward instructional practices that utilize current research; classrooms and schools designed to incorporate effective schools research; enhanced staff and curriculum development; early intervention and transition programs; and postsecondary education, training, work, and community living options.

Fundamental to the work in school effectiveness (exemplified best, perhaps, by the late Ron Edmond's efforts in New York City's public schools) is the principle that school improvement must involve both equality and equity. In other words, the results of school reform must benefit all students. The effective schools research identified five factors that characterize schools that achieve equality and equity: (1) high expectations for all students, and staff acceptance of responsibility for students' learning; (2) instructional leadership on the part of the principal; (3) a safe and orderly environment conducive to learning; (4) a clear and focused mission concerning instructional goals shared by the staff; and (5) frequent monitoring of student progress. Work on effective instructional techniques, including teacher-directed instruction, increased academic engaged time, use of reinforcement, and individual instruction has paralleled much of the effective schools research.

While tutoring programs have involved students with handicaps for some time, more recently programs have been developed in which students with handicaps serve as tutors for other students with handicaps and for those without. This serves to integrate students with handicaps, to promote respect for their capacity, and to enable them to learn by teaching.

Recent reports on cross-cultural education can provide additional features worth emulating in a new unitary system. In Japan, for example, reports note the importance of clear purpose, strong motivation, and high standards; the importance of parental involvement and reinforcement between home and school; and the importance of maximum time devoted to learning and its effective use. Perhaps most central is the belief that differences in student achievement come not from innate differences in ability but from level of effort, perseverance, and self-discipline, each of which the school can encourage and teach. While for some students appropriately labeled as handicapped, innate differences are limiting, for most now in special education they are not.

In the United States, there is a body of "adaptive education" approaches and specific educational practice attuned to individual differences, which have been shown to be effective for students with handicapping conditions. Asserting the legal duty to provide effective schooling, lawyers at the Public Interest Law Center of Philadelphia put it succinctly: "Play school is out. Schooling is a profession. The law requires that practice in the schools measure up to the art of what has been demonstrated by the

professional to be possible. What is done must be calculated to be effective." In the Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM) and similar programs, there is a design that integrates both those that are labeled as handicapped and those that are not and that benefits both.

Conclusion

The ultimate rationale for quality education of students in an integrated setting is not based on law or pedagogy alone, but on values. What kind of people are we? What kind of society do we wish to develop? What values do we honor? The current failure to provide a quality education to all students and the perpetuation of segregated settings expresses one set of answers to these questions. To change the outcome, we need to develop another set of values. As Walter Lippman said in 1922, "If a child fails in school and then fails in life, the schools cannot sit back and say: 'You see how accurately I predicted this.' Unless we are to admit that education is essentially impotent, we have to throw back the child's failure at the school, and describe it as a failure not by the child but by the school."

While there is neither agreement among educators nor commitment by policymakers to a unitary system of quality education for all students, especially commitment in terms of money, we believe "we can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need in order to do this. Whether we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't done it so far."